

Pipeline study defunct

Written by

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said its environmental review of entrepreneur Aaron Million's 550-mile water pipeline project was dead in the water before Million could terminate the study himself.

Million said Friday he terminated the environmental review of his Regional Watershed Supply Project, but the Army Corps on Thursday canceled the \$3 million review itself after Million re-purposed the project, said Rena Brand, the Army Corps' regulatory official overseeing the review.

How much of the Army Corps' work was wasted is unknown, Brand said.

"It is unclear how information we've gathered and analyzed would be used," she said.

The Army Corps has spent the last two years conducting the Million-financed environmental impact study of the proposed pipeline, which would siphon about 250,000 acre-feet of water annually from the Green River at Wyoming's Flaming Gorge Reservoir, pump it over the Continental Divide and pipe it via Fort Collins to irrigators and municipal water

districts on Colorado's Front Range.

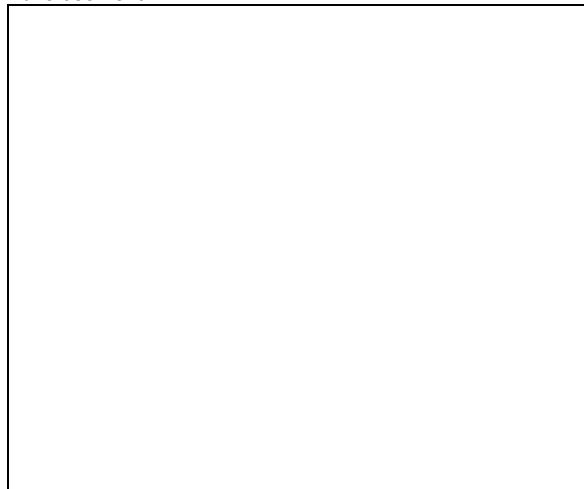
Million said Friday he decided to terminate the Army Corps study, called an environmental impact statement, or EIS, and permitting process and move it to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or FERC, which permits hydropower projects.

He said the focus of the project had changed from water delivery to hydropower generation because the pipeline would produce more than 1,000 megawatts of electricity as the water tumbles from Laramie, Wyo., to Fort Collins.

Million said Friday he plans to file a permit application with FERC this week. He said he believes having the pipeline permitted by FERC would dramatically reduce the environmental review and permitting time from more than seven years to about 2½ years.

Brand said the Army Corps informed Million on Thursday that the agency terminated the study itself because the change in

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project focus made "its purpose uncertain" and the pipeline's Army Corps permit application incomplete.

When Million's team informed the Army Corps in April that the purpose of the pipeline would change from water delivery to hydropower, Million asked the agency to halt the environmental review for 60 days to give him time to decide the future of the project and inform the Army Corps about whether he wants the review to continue.

Brand said Million did not respond "in an appropriate manner" by his July 5 deadline, despite telling the Coloradoan in June that he planned to do so.

"We had a phone call from one of his team members the day before the deadline asking for more time," Brand said. The Corps specifically asked Million to let them know by the deadline how he intended to resume the EIS, he said.

Million said Monday his team asked for several more days in order to finalize the permit application with FERC.

With no satisfactory response by July 5, "we decided that now is the time to officially terminate the EIS," Brand said, adding that such a repurposing of a project mid-way through an environmental review is highly unusual.

Million said he expects all of the Army Corps' work of the last two years to be transferred to FERC and incorporated into its possible environmental review of the

project, but Brand said she's unsure if that's possible.

The Army Corps' study was conducted under the auspices of a permit application that said the pipeline would be used solely for water delivery with little mention of hydropower.

FERC, Million said, will provide a more "structured" and "mandated" permitting process than the Army Corps could accomplish.

Brand said she doesn't know how much money has been spent on the terminated study, which was financed by Million, but part of a federal program supported by tax dollars.

"I think the Corps recognized that this is a project that is not ripe for primetime," said Stacy Tellinghuisen, a water policy analyst for pipeline critic Western Resource Advocates in Boulder. "FERC hopefully will see the same."

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